

A THEORETICAL INTERLUDE

2. *Problem of Historical Development*

This leads us to the second basic problem, that of the historical development in colonial areas. How can we reconcile the establishment of a socialist society in the colonies with the fact that these areas have not yet entered the capitalist epoch of their historical development? To a Marxist who believes in "scientific" immutable laws of history, it is difficult to admit that a given country may skip an entire epoch, pass from the feudal straight into the socialist society, and thus avoid altogether the capitalist stage.

To understand the practical implications of this problem we may realize that Soviet authorities had, from the beginning, to solve this very question in the oriental districts of the former tsarist Empire to which they had become heirs. Should Transcaucasia and Turkestan immediately become socialist after the revolution, or should they be permitted to develop capitalism, and only after a considerable length of time, be transformed into socialist communities? The Soviet government did not seem to have a very clear blueprint in this field, and the initial steps were somewhat confused. While the upper, more theoretically minded circles of the Communist party would not admit a sudden jump of a backward Moslem area into socialism, the men who were assigned to the concrete duty of strengthening the Soviet power in these districts ruthlessly displayed their zeal in converting Azerbaijanis, Georgians, Bukharans, Khivans, and Kirghiz, to Communism.

This produced acute tensions and required a clear formulation of policy. The task fell upon Stalin, who since his first study on *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question* in 1913 was regarded as a

foremost party theorist in this field. No doubt with the approval of Lenin, Stalin solved this intricate problem by stating that it was possible for a feudalistic country to skip the capitalist phase and establish socialism. But such a process should be carried out with great caution and the tactics employed should be elastic. He expressed these ideas at the Tenth Congress of the Russian Communist Party in 1921:

The fact of the matter is that a number of peoples, mainly Turkic peoples—about thirty million in all—have not passed, have not had time to

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